

December 2, 2018

“Praying through Christmas: The Magnificat”
Luke 1:46-56

FCF: Our struggle to pray

PROPOSITION: (anchor) Mary’s experience and prayer was unique.
(magnet) But we must consider and apply it to our own.

SCRIPTURE INTRODUCTION:

Our relationships tend to falter when communication breaks down. Think about that for a moment - the tie between relationships and communication - and all the ways that is so clearly true. Politics, the workplace, the church, and the home. Pushing further, if I were to ask, “How’s your relationship with God?” many of us would say, “Okay. It’s been better. Well, honestly, I feel distant from God.” It’s quite possible that part of the reason for that distance we feel is our struggle to pray. Again, our relationships tend to falter when communication breaks down.

This is the first installment in our Advent series. We’re going to be working through a few passages in Luke’s Gospel that may help us in this struggle and encourage us to pray.

SCRIPTURE READING: Luke 1:46-56**PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION****SERMON INTRODUCTION:**

The context of this prayer, this song, is worth noting. The annunciation that Mary was to bear the Son of God has been made by an angel. This sets up the visitation between her and Elizabeth, who was already carrying John. At that meeting, the two covenants, new and old, connect. It was dramatic. John jumps and Elizabeth declares Mary to be the mother of her Lord.

We don’t know what Mary was feeling. Likely a mix of fear, uncertainty, wonder and awe. We do know she has baggage. By that, I mean the mistaken titles and myths told about her by the Roman Catholic Church. But, with that, the mistaken over-reaction by Protestants. No, Mary is not the source of our salvation. But we ought not ignore her example and model.

Let me put it this way. The Virgin Birth was unique. But not absolutely so (**READ Luke 1:46-49**). Is Mary the only one who could speak this way? Is there not something in this prayer for every one of God’s people? Yes, Mary’s circumstances were unique. But God was doing this because of who He is and always will be. So, yes, Mary’s experience and prayer was unique. Absolutely. But we ought not to set it aside. Rather, we must consider and apply it to our own.

How so? In three ways. First, as we look to God’s mercy. Second, as we rely on His power. And, third, as we trust in his promises. Mary prayed with that in mind. And so can we.

I. LOOKING TO HIS MERCY

First, God’s mercy (**READ Luke 1:50**). To the fearful God shows Himself to be merciful.

A) To the Fearful

1. Who - negatively

We should be clear on this idea of “the fearful.” This is not fear as in terror, anxiety, or worry.

2. Who - positively

This is reverence, an obedience that seeks to please and honor the Lord. That's very different. This is what the Bible means when it says, "The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom."

B) He Shows Mercy

In that sense, it is to the fearful that God then shows Himself to be merciful.

1. An assumption of helplessness

That assumes our helplessness. We know the poverty of our resources - physically, emotionally, spiritually. We know we have nowhere else to go. It's what we see time and again in the Psalms.

2. An assurance of help

Now with mercy there's an assumption of helplessness and an assurance of help (READ Exodus 34:6-7). As sure as the sun gives light, God shows us mercy. For that is His character, His heart.

And so, in that sense, it is to the fearful that God shows Himself to be merciful.

Application:

What does this have to do with prayer? Mary's prayer should shape our own. "Lord, help me to fear you. May I not presume upon your love but cherish it. Help me not to ignore your counsel and commands but yearn for them. And show me your mercy. My heart is bruised, my hope is fading. Near and far - where are you? Make me fearful. Show me your mercy."

Mary's experience and prayer was unique. But we must consider and apply it to our own.

II. RELYING ON HIS POWER

Next is God's power (READ Luke 1:51-53). To the humble God shows His power.

A) To the Humble

1. Who - negatively

Again, we should be clear on our terms. The humble are not those who think less of themselves.

2. Who - positively

They are those who think of themselves less (READ Luke 1:38a, 46-48a). Besides being a poor girl from Nazareth, Mary knows she is a sinner. She knows she is in no place to make demands.

B) He Shows His Power

In that sense, it is to the humble that God shows Himself to be powerful.

1. Striking reversals

Note the verbs and the striking reversals. Bringing down and lifting up. Filling and emptying.

2. Sweeping in scope

But why the past tense? These striking reversals are sweeping in scope. Mary is speaking not only of what God has done. She can see what He was doing and would do through this Child.

It is to the humble God gladly shows Himself to be powerful.

Application:

What does this have to do with prayer? Mary's prayer should shape our own. "Lord, I am proud. I think of myself too much. I don't assume the place of a servant but of a lord to be

worshipped and served. Birth your humility in me. And show me your power. Your kingdom come in my family, church, workplace, and city. Make me a servant and show me your power.”

Mary’s experience and prayer was unique. But we must consider and apply it to our own.

III. TRUSTING IN HIS PROMISES

Finally, His promises ([READ Luke 1:54-55](#)). To His beloved God shows faithfulness.

A) *To His Beloved*

1. Going way back

To understand these terms, we have to go way back through Israel’s history to the beginning. Not just to Abraham but before, to Adam and the promise behind it all ([READ Genesis 3:15](#)).

2. Going way deep

So we have to go way back. And go way deep ([READ Deuteronomy 7:6-8](#)). “God, why do you love us?” “Just because.” His love goes way deep. There isn’t any other answer. He just does.

B) *He Shows Himself Faithful*

We are His beloved. And it is to His beloved that He delights to show Himself faithful.

1. The Incarnation - fulfillment

The Incarnation is the fulfillment of all that had come before. That’s why Mary’s prayer is full of Old Testament references. All the sacrifices, the key figures, the major events pointing to Jesus.

2. The Incarnation - guarantee

The Incarnation is the fulfillment of it all. And a guarantee that all His promises are sure. Think with me. Can we trust God? Can we count on Him? We see the answer is yes. Not necessarily as we think He must. But as He knows He must, as will serve our truest deepest surest good.

To His beloved, to His own, God delights to show Himself to be faithful.

Application:

What does this have to do with prayer? Mary’s prayer should shape our own. “Lord, help me to know how treasured I am already to you, how secure I am in your love. My holiness does not earn your love. But your love should make me yearn for holiness. Press that on my heart. And show me your faithfulness. Help me to pray as in the Psalms, ‘This is what you said. But this what I see.’ Help me to pray with such boldness. ‘In remembrance of your mercy, help us.’ As you have done before, do so now. May I know your love and trust in your promises.”

Mary’s experience and prayer was unique. But we must consider and apply it to our own.

CONCLUSION:

There are many things to the holiday season that could be left behind. Think of some of the TV specials you’ve seen. Or some of our family traditions. Then there are some cultural customs. The first entry in a list, “Eight Truly Strange Christmas Customs” ([READ quote](#)):

St. Nicholas, Father Christmas, or Santa Claus is the weirdest Christmas tradition ever, but he is so well known and so well documented that his origins are beyond the scope of this particular post. As a tool to encourage good behavior in children, Santa serves as the carrot, and [Krampus](#) is the stick. Krampus is the

evil demon anti-Santa, or maybe his evil twin. Krampus Night is celebrated on December 5th, the eve of St. Nicholas Day in Austria and other parts of Europe. People dress as Krampus and roam the streets looking for someone to beat with a stick. Since it is also a night for drinking, the beatings probably don't hurt much.

Sounds great, right? There are many things to the holiday season that could be left behind.

But not this prayer. Yes, Mary's experience and prayer was unique. But not absolutely so. So it ought not to be set aside. Not only because it is instructive but because it can be so transformative to our own experience and prayer. If we can really hear her and begin to take these words to heart, it will ignite our desire to pray. And fuel the fire of our prayers as well.

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